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TAGS: [ES](#) [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER FMLN CITY COUNCILMAN SENTENCED TO 35 YEARS  
FOR ASSASSINATING TWO POLICEMEN

REF: A. 06 SAN SALVADOR 1736

[1](#)B. 06 SAN SALVADOR 2016

[1](#)1. (U) On August 15, Jose Mario Belloso, a former Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) city councilman was sentenced to 35 years in prison for the 2006 assassination of two riot control police officers and the attempted murder of five other members of the riot police.

[1](#)2. (U) During a July 5, 2006 demonstration outside the University of El Salvador, militants associated with the Revolutionary Student Brigade and the Popular Youth Movement became violent and began vandalizing property. As police tried to restore order, a sniper, later identified as Belloso, fired on police with an assault rifle, killing two riot control officers and wounding ten others. Belloso's accomplice, Luis Antonio Herrador, who was apprehended shortly after the murders, subsequently confessed to his role in the killings. He was sentenced last month to 23 years in prison. Belloso remained at large until his arrest in San Salvador on July 2 2007. According to unsubstantiated media reports, subsequent to his arrest Belloso told Salvadoran authorities that current members of the FMLN leadership were aware of the existence of armed groups prepared to undertake violent political action on behalf of the FMLN.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Comment: The Belloso conviction illustrates several key dynamics of the Salvadoran political and judicial systems. From a political perspective, the conviction demonstrates that the Saca administration will not tolerate the return of the violent political activity and public disturbances characteristic of the civil-war era. The conviction also reinforces the Saca Administration's, and, by implication, ARENA's strong commitment to law and order. Whether or not the Attorney General chooses to look further into Belloso's allegations that key FMLN leaders knew of the existence of armed political action groups could also have significant political ramifications. At the same time, the comparatively light sentence handed down demonstrates key shortcomings in the Salvadoran judicial system. By opting to treat the two homicides and three attempted murders as a single act, the presiding judge significantly decreased the amount of time Belloso will spend behind bars. (Note: Under Salvadoran law, each individual homicide conviction could have carried a 50 year penalty. In keeping with the judge's decision, Belloso probably faces 17 years of actual prison time. End note). The judge also ruled that given Belloso's age (he is 31 years old) any prison sentence greater than 35 years would have amounted to life imprisonment, which is prohibited by the Salvadoran constitution. In this particular high-profile case, as well as thousands of lesser known proceedings, the unwillingness of Salvadoran judges to impose lengthy prison sentences undermines public confidence in the judicial system and strengthens the impression that criminals act with near impunity. On a bilateral level, Salvadoran judicial aversion to long prison sentences and the

constitutional prohibition on life imprisonment complicates  
U.S. efforts to move forward on extradition. End Comment.  
Glazer